

MOHSIN HAMID, PRECARITY, AND THE (RE) EDUCATION OF WESTERN  
AUDIENCES IN POST-9/11 WEST ASIAN LITERATURE

by

Ami Rogalski Raggio

July, 2016

Director of Thesis: Richard Taylor, PhD

Major Department: English

This thesis explores the idea that the theory of precarity, as found throughout Judith Butler's post-9/11 essays, makes a useful tool and criticism in analyzing Mohsin Hamid's post-9/11 work to discover that one of the messages of Hamid is the re-education of Western audiences. Beginning with a general discussion of precarity and its prime culprit, neoliberalism, the thesis explores three of Hamid's post-9/11 works: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, and *Discontent and its Civilizations: Dispatches from Lahore, New York, and London*. In the examination of each novel, this thesis will discuss the precariousness found in West Asia, the possible explanations of this precarity that can be found in the links between precariousness and neoliberalism, and how both precarity and neoliberalism are presented by Hamid in each novel in a re-education intended for Western audiences.



MOHSIN HAMID, PRECARITY, AND THE (RE) EDUCATION OF WESTERN  
AUDIENCES IN POST-9/11 WEST ASIAN LITERATURE

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of English

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Ami Rogalski Raggio

July, 2016

© Ami Rogalski Raggio, 2016

MOHSIN HAMID, PRECARITY, AND THE (RE) EDUCATION OF WESTERN AUDIENCES IN POST-9/11

WEST ASIAN LITERATURE

by

Ami Rogalski Raggio

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF  
THESIS: \_\_\_\_\_

Richard Taylor, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Will Banks, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Andrea Kitta, PhD

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT  
OF ENGLISH: \_\_\_\_\_

Marianne Montgomery, PhD

DEAN OF THE  
GRADUATE SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

Paul J. Gemperline, PhD

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my children, Rebekah and Eli. You are the reason I strive to achieve my dreams and explore to understand this world. May you live to see a life in which precariousness and economic inequalities are antiquated. I love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank profusely my thesis committee, Dr. Will Banks, Dr. Andrea Kitta, and *especially* my thesis director, Dr. Richard Taylor, for their encouragement, interest, and support for my work and ideas and their kindness and patience for every question I had. Thank you, all, for taking time out of your London planning and *vacation* to help me finalize these words and drafts. Rick, thank you for always being available and gracious with me.

I would also like to thank my children, Rebekah and Eli, for their patience as they shared their mother's attentions, constantly. I would like to thank my parents for helping me so much with work, school, kids, and everything in between. And finally, I would like to thank Chris Raggio, who always believed in me, so much so, that this milestone was always expected and never questioned.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE .....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
SIGNATURE.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE: PRECARIITY, PRECARIOUSNESS, AND NEOLIBERALISM: WHOSE FAULT IS IT, ANYWAY? .....	6
CHAPTER TWO: THE NEOLIBERAL TEMPER TANTRUM: BUSINESS AND FUNDAMENTALISM.....	17
CHAPTER THREE: GETTING RICH AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS: NEOLIBERAL FREE MARKETS.....	31
CHAPTER FOUR: DISMANTLING THE FRAMES AND EXPOSING THE FRAMER: THE DISCONTENT OF NEOLIBERALISM .....	44
WORKS CITED .....	54



## Introduction

In this thesis I argue that a theory of precarity, which purports that all lives are precarious and tenuous, can be used successfully to analyze the West Asian author Mohsin Hamid's post-9/11 works. The theory of precarity expounded by Judith Butler claims that human lives are "dependent on a world of others, constituted in and by a social world" ("Precarious Life" 141). What Butler contends is that life is connected socially but this connection can often seem illusory, creating a sense of segregation among peoples. Butler goes on to write, "To find that one's life is also the life of others, even as this life is distinct and must be distinct, means that one's boundary is at once a limit and a site of adjacency, a mode of spatial and temporal nearness and even boundedness" (141). This means that whereas all life is connected symbiotically, we tend to perceive our individuality as a physical separation between bodies and live our lives in cooperative small clumps or units, not seeing farther than our families and communities without much regard to our social obligations or responsibilities to larger units or the rest of the world. When we forget our connectivity or social obligations towards all life, we neither recognize nor do we acknowledge the Other's life being lived. This creates the Other: an entity not connected to us and so we are not invested in obligation or responsibility toward them. This thesis will discuss how global neoliberal policies have contributed to the differential distribution of precarity, which is to say why certain nations and peoples experience greater precarity than others. When Butler's theory of precarity is applied to Hamid's work, the re-education of the Western reader emerges as Hamid explains what it is like to be from a precarious nation, what it is like to suffer from neoliberal politics and economics, and what, precisely, it is like to be Pakistani in a world dominated by Western post-9/11 paradigms—paradigms not universally shared. This thesis defines neoliberal politics as a ruthlessly individual ideology that embraces

privatization over social obligation. I will demonstrate that much of the precariousness that exists today can be linked to the neoliberal turn in both political and economic philosophies, most notably professed by the West, but also found in the burgeoning East as well. This thesis will elaborate on the link between neoliberalism and precarity forged by Hamid's post-9/11 writing.

In Chapter 1, "Precarity, Precariousness, and Neoliberalism: Whose Fault Is It, Anyway," I examine the theory of precarity, primarily as described by Judith Butler in her *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* collections of essays. Whereas the theory of precarity is a sociological theory, I contend that it works magnificently as a literary criticism as well. I will take Butler's contention that "we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another" and that our lives have a fundamental dependency on "anonymous others" and apply this to each of Hamid's three works (*Precarious Life* xii). I will show that when Butler avers that "no security measure will foreclose this dependency; no violent act of sovereignty will rid the world of this fact [...] There are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more suspect to arbitrary violence than others," Hamid verifies that she is correct (xii). This distribution of vulnerability is paramount to the theory of precarity because those of us in the Western world, who enjoy relatively peaceful and rich lives, experience less precarity than those whose less certain lives dominate the pages of Hamid's work. In the first chapter, I link this inequality that's fundamental to precarity to neoliberal economic and political practices and their consequences. In Chapter 1, I also discuss the neoliberal framework that I am using to analyze Hamid. I rely heavily on both David Harvey and Noam Chomsky to provide the theoretical definitions and examples to justify my position and to link Butler's precarity to both Hamid and neoliberal policies.

In Chapter 2, “Neoliberal Temper Tantrum: Business and Fundamentalism,” I look exclusively at Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and explain how the theory of precarity, as explained by Judith Butler, is, unequivocally, made manifest in the transformation of Changez, Hamid’s, arguably semi-autobiographical character. In fact, it is because of the neoliberal policies that are originally espoused and performed by the main character that ultimately awaken his eyes to the precarity that surrounds him and the further precariousness that he creates by doggedly focusing on the fundamentals of business-inspired governmentality.

In Chapter 2, I draw from Joseph Darda, whose 2014 essay on Hamid was inspirational for me. Darda was my first introduction to the link between precarity and Hamid and the importance of that interplay on the transnational scale. Peter Morey’s work, particularly his analysis of Hamid as post-9/11 fiction is also foundational for this thesis; Morey posits that Hamid “challenges the orthodoxies of the post-9/11 novel that, until its publication, had generally taken the form of documents of personal trauma and loss, or recapitulations of unproblematic notions of essential cultural differences” (Morey 135). Anna Hartnell’s work on the liminality and marginality of the immigrant, especially after the nationalism that surged following the events of 9/11 coincide with my interpretations of Changez’s metamorphosis as well. I expand on these thoughts as I synthesize historical geopolitical happenstance as recorded by Jehangir Khan as I highlight the education a Westerner can expect from thinking through Hamid’s writings with a *precarious* lens.

In Chapter 3, “Getting Rich at the Expense of Others: Neoliberal Free Markets,” I discuss Hamid’s second post-9/11 novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. I return to Butler’s *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* to examine the precarity of the main character’s life, that of his family, and of the pretty girl. Hartnell also lends to Judith Butler’s thoughts on precarity and

its uneven distribution. I also discuss the roles of women and thoughts on gender, specifically the marginality of the female gender in the developing world, and how this relates to neoliberalism. I argue that Hamid's novel skirts the issue of Western imperialism without pointing fingers; the characters are symbols of real precarity that is created out of Western neoliberal practices. Further, the neoliberal machinations behind the evolution of the public to the private and the state's declining power to regulate economic, civic, and even utilitarian life are made prominent in Hamid's protagonist's meteoritic rise to power and affluence, as Lisa Duggan also outlines in her book *Twilight of Equality*.

In Chapter 4, "Dismantling the Frames and Exposing the Frames and Exposing the Framer: The Discontent of Neoliberalism," I look to Hamid's personal essays for real-world experience and expertise about being a person from a precarious nation, and how he brings his precariousness with him when he travels. In other words, Hamid demonstrates that precarity is not something that one can leave behind in upward mobility unless the frames through which the rest of the world views one are further improved as well. In his collection of essays, *Discontent and its Civilizations, Dispatches from Lahore, New York, and London*, Hamid writes poignantly and personally of his experiences as a global citizen from Pakistan. This chapter demonstrates how Hamid writes of his experiences as a liminal figure of precarity by synthesizing his works, along with recent neoliberal and geopolitical happenstance, and connect them to many of Hamid's own experiences and his quest to re-educate Western audiences to the acknowledgement of the intentional framing of West Asia and the West's complicity in the differential distribution of precarity through its neoliberal practices.

My choice of subject and author was inspired by the desire to contribute to transnational scholarship and to the acknowledgment of precarity, precariousness, and the obligations in

between. I believe, because of contemporary geopolitical turmoil, that this topic is relevant and its research is necessary. September 11, 2001, is arguably the most important date of the twenty-first century; there seems to be very little left untouched by 9/11 or its aftermath: the War on Terror. Close to four years after the terror attacks in the US, attacks occurred in London, known colloquially to the British as 7/7. Prime Minister Tony Blair announced to the world that the “rules of the game have changed” (as qtd. in Morey 135). The rules to which Tony Blair was referring included not only the rules of orchestrated and state-sanctioned warfare, but also the rules affecting other sectors of modern life, such as banking, business, and the paradigmatic frames one wears when viewing the world. Literary responses have varied, although some critics recognize the growing trend of many post-9/11 West Asian authors who speak out, or write back, against the dominant Western perception of fundamentalism as belonging to Islamic tradition, being West Asian, and the effects of neoliberal economic policies and trends. Many Western authors continue to adhere to the Western model that 9/11 occurred, and the War on Terror continues, only because of Islamic religious extremism and fundamentalism. Mohsin Hamid writes back against these Western allegations and claims that nationalism combined with the after-effects of neoliberal economic fundamentalism—not religious fundamentalism—creates the discontented and disgruntled peoples of the developing world. They become aware of their precarity and are angered by continued imperial-like neoliberal policies. Hamid writes back against the image the western media perpetuates about West Asia, and in doing so, he re-educates the western reader to the political and economic side-effects, which manifests as increased precarity, caused by Western neoliberal practice

## CHAPTER ONE: PRECARITY, PRECARIOUSNESS, AND NEOLIBERALISM: WHOSE FAULT IS IT, ANYWAY?

“With disproportionate influence over the media and the political process this class [...] has both the incentive and the power to persuade us that we are all better off under a neoliberal regime of freedoms. For the elite, living comfortably in their gilded ghettos, the world must indeed seem a better place.” (Harvey 38)

As of this writing, Pakistan author Mohsin Hamid has published three novels and one collection of essays and letters. In this thesis, I focus mainly on his post-9/11 work, although I must admit that his themes of precarity and the re-education of Western audiences appear as strongly in his pre-9/11 work as they do in his later work. Throughout this thesis, precarity is a term that is usually synonymous with instability, lack of safety, poverty and illness, while precariousness—the state of precarity—should be understood as an affliction that is not equally shared across the globe. That is to say that although all of life has the threat of precarity thrust upon it at any time, the actual distribution of precariousness is uneven, as we see as we look at how precariousness functions differently in first and developing nations. Throughout his work, Hamid writes poignantly of his experiences of being from a country about which the rest of the world does not understand. Whereas the media machines of the West tend to portray a single story or picture of the Middle East or West Asia, Hamid writes about a nation that is not accurately described through Western paradigmatic frames. Instead of a land in which rabid religiously fundamental Muslims rule a devout and obedient people with the Koran in hand, Hamid writes about secular Pakistani youth having the same secular hopes, dreams, and desires as American youth. This misconception of the West is a continuation of the mantle of Orientalism Edward Said outlines in his historical critique; Orientalism, the European perception of the Middle East and West Asia, does not exist in the form in which it propagates through the airwaves or in print. It is, instead, a European fantasy or frame through which the Orient is viewed by Europeans and Westerners. For Said (1979), “Orientalism was ultimately a political

vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”))” (43). Further, Said posits that the “Orientalist reality is both antihuman and persistent. Its scope, as much as its institutions and all-pervasive influence, lasts up to the present” (44). Thus, there is more to a Pakistani than just religion and nuclear armament. Much of these misconceptions of Pakistani peoples and economic situations can be linked to a history of imperialism and interference from the West and not blamed solely on Pakistani peoples.

Mohsin Hamid re-educates western audiences by offering a different frame with which to view people and life outside the developed normality. In his work, Hamid describes, quite poignantly, what it is like to be a person whose life is lived in lands in which first-world commodities, safeties, and safety-nets are lacking or non-existent. His characters are contemporary; like Westerners, their lives are significant to those around them, but their futures are tenuous as their relative safety, health, and job prospects appear bleak. The differences between first and developing worlds can be explained through the relative and differential distributions of precarity, but this is not always remembered when viewing media reports or the single story that seems to stem from precarious lands and countries. Hamid interweaves the precariousness that comes hand-in-hand from being in and from West Asia within his stories and letters that describe people, humans, trying to succeed and thrive despite a nation burdened by neoliberal and imperial-like economic theories. More importantly, by analyzing Hamid’s work I demonstrate how using the theory of precarity, the reasons for the unequal circulation of precariousness across the globe can be traced to the socio-economic effects of neoliberalism, while the fates of his characters and their precarity can be traced to neoliberal policy, which will be discussed shortly.

## Precarity Defined

My analysis of Hamid's work has developed through a theory of precarity, which understands all life as hanging in the balance between what is known and what is unknown, as always vulnerable to and never escaping death, and as always reliant upon a host of unknown and uncontrollable variables. Despite the uncertainty that permeates all lives, not all lives are lived are recognized as equal. That is to say that all life is precarious but not all life is recognized as *life* nor, according to Butler, is all life *grievable*. Therefore, whereas all lives end, not all lives are recognized to have been lived, to have experienced life as a full expression of one's individual humanity. These are two main tenets of the theory of precarity; a social theory gaining prominence through the works of Judith Butler and contemporarily being linked, with great success, to the consequences of the last half-century of neoliberal economic theory and policy. It is these two main assumptions, with some expansion, that I will use not only as a social commentary, but also as a literary tool to understand Mohsin Hamid's post 9/11 work to expose the lessons of precarity posed to Western audiences.

Humans have advanced beyond their wildest dreams; the evolution from cave dwellers to space walkers happened in the blink of a cosmic eye. Yet, we seem to struggle with the simplest of things, such as defining what life is—*what* constitutes life? *What* makes life livable? Religious debates rage in the Western world over when life begins and if, when, and how it should end with dignity. What can be said unequivocally is that from inception, life is precarious—*all* life is precarious. Butler says this of being born into a life:

It is not that we are born and then later become precarious, but rather that precariousness is coextensive with birth itself (birth is, by definition, precarious), which means that it matters whether or not this infant being survives, and that its



survival is dependent on what we might call a social network of hands. (Frames 14)

Like Levinas, Butler argues that life is precarious is because of its inherent obligation and subjugation to all other lives that surround it, which is to say that precarity begins with birth and continues and manifests itself within the social obligations that create both a dependency and responsibility for all life.

However, while all life is precarious, not all of life is grievable; not all life is valued. It is *only* under conditions that subscribe a value or meaning to its loss can a life be said to be grievable; there must be someone able to grieve for it once it has ended. With no grieving, there is no value; that life is meaningless. This statement speaks to the relativity and subjectivity of all life. Whereas my life may matter to those in my immediate environment, and to those who rely upon me, it holds little meaning to countless others to whom I mean or supply nothing—or rather, in that they cannot see what I supply or mean, my life is seen to be meaningless. A recent example of the theory of precarity is the world's reaction to the Paris attacks that occurred Friday, November 13, 2015. Throughout the night, gunmen and suicide bombers terrorized Paris, Parisians, and all others who were enjoying the sights and culture the city has to offer. The Western world grieved, heavily, for its sister city. Social media campaigns and signs that read *Pray for Paris* flooded Western screens amidst much criticism against the hypocrisy of this reaction. The criticisms stemmed from the lack of Western response to suicide bombings that occurred just the day before, on Thursday, November 12, 2015 in Syria from an orchestrated attack that killed more than 40 people.

Sadly, the Syrian attacks did not register widely in the Western media. Those lives lost were not recognized; they were not grieved. The developing world cried that when brown

people are killed in Syria, the Western hegemony turns a blind eye. Conversely, the developing world noticed that when white people are killed in Paris, it is a tragedy for the West. Instead of seeing this as solely a race issue, I argue that this is also an issue of precarity. While some critics have placed the blame nearly exclusively as the feet of race or racism, I would argue that precarity, which includes race, offers another compelling argument for why the West was able to see the mostly white bodies of Paris as grievable and the mostly brown bodies of Syria as not. Peoples in Paris expect to be safer, to not be gunned down in a fit of violence or victims of a suicide attack. Paris enjoys a smaller distribution of precarity than Syria whose precariousness has sadly been growing since the 2011 uprising, but can be traced to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and its French imperial-like occupation. Simply stated, suicide attacks and raw violence are expected in the tumultuous and war-torn areas of the Middle East and West Asia, not in the center of Paris. This is not to say that the attacks in Paris were more unjust, merely that to the West, Syria is framed differently from Paris. Western peoples are under the illusion that they are safer and more secure in their cities and towns than the residents of developing nations. The shock and jolt of the Paris attacks, much like the London and New York attacks, awakens the Western world, for a time, to their own precariousness. Unfortunately, it does not always follow that the West extends that sense of precarity to others; often the Other is blamed for the West's suddenly observed precarity.

One way to look at the subjectivity and relativity of life is to recognize the frames in which life is presented. When Butler writes of frames, she uses a dual meaning. In one sense, a frame is the lens through which we view the lives around us; our frames create the context in which we produce judgement and values, and we determine value based upon context alone. When we are shown countless images of suffering, poverty, and human subjugation, we begin to

frame the lands from which those images stem a certain way, regardless of the fact that those images are not necessarily an accurate depiction or the only story that land has to tell. In another sense, Butler articulates a frame as a convenient set up or to “have evidence planted against one that ultimately ‘proves’ one’s guilt” (*Frames* 8). One has to question whether the second framing, the one in which we are conditioned to accept or expect more precariousness in developing nations, is a purposeful machination that covers some hidden truth? Is the precarity that threatens West Asia more from neoliberal policies instigated by the West rather than native religious fundamentalism as we are conditioned to believe?

Whereas both frames of examining life, value, and precariousness are pertinent to this discussion of Hamid’s work, it is with the second meaning, of being purposefully or strategically framed, into which I would like to digress next in order to make a larger argument about how precarity functions in Hamid’s works. I contend, like many others, that much precariousness is delivered and caused by the neoliberal economic paradigm that has taken hold over most of the industrialized world. Neoliberal economic, and to some extent socio-political, theories provide one argument for the continued uneven and inequitable distribution of precariousness around the globe. Then the framing of the inequality of the distribution of precariousness begins to make sense once a thorough analysis of neoliberalism is discussed.

The neoliberal turn has a subtle beginning. Most experts pinpoint the current manifestation to the 1970s and 1980s, especially the years under which the Western world was dominated by the ideologies and policies of Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher. Under both elected heads of state, a “market revolution” occurred; *The New York Times* reported “governments are everywhere embracing the free-market gospel preached in the 1980s by President Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain” (as qtd in Chomsky 66). It is

the complete and utter deregulation of the markets that made this neoliberal capitalism different from the capitalism of the preceding years. The complete deregulation of the markets creates a profit free-for-all, which only the elite shareholders can enjoy. Complete deregulation and free markets also means that little to no governmental or public safeguards are left. International tariffs and taxes on corporations were obliterated and free trade agreements spread rampantly.

In theory, unrestricted free markets inevitably lead to “continuous increases in productivity,” which then should create better or higher standards of living for all classes (Harvey 64). There is the assumption that “a rising tide lifts all boats” and that the “‘trickle down’ neoliberal theory holds that the elimination of poverty (both domestically and worldwide) can best be secured through free markets and free trade” (64-65). According to neoliberal theory, a trickle-down economy contends that when the elite and upper classes enjoy profit and wealth, profit and wealth will invariably trickle down to the middle and working classes in the form of job creation. Other tenets of neoliberalism include small, limited central governments, the privatization of all public services, like water, healthcare, and education—no social safety nets, such as welfare—and a staunch stance on personal responsibilities and freedoms. In fact, the liberal part of the name, neoliberalism, comes from the strong belief in and commitment to the freedoms of personal and private properties, a liberation from social and public obligations. Neoliberals disdain trade unions, social programs, or any other allegiances to groups which limit individuality. These points are seen in Margaret Thatcher’s rhetoric when she so famously declared that there was “‘no such thing as society, only individual men and women’ [...] All forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values” (as qtd in Harvey 23).

However utopian as it may sound in theory, neoliberalism in practice has had devastating results on all but a minute few. Its failure is in its design. Because social solidarity is antithetical to neoliberal beliefs, those who would benefit from social programs, like welfare, unemployment, and disability are left in their states of need; their precariousness is advanced, and they become further disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Henry describes it quite succinctly:

As the state withdraws from welfare provision and diminishes its role in arenas such as health care, public education, and social services, which were once so fundamental to embedded liberalism, it leaves larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment. The social safety net is reduced to a bare minimum in favour of a system that emphasizes personal responsibility. Personal failure is generally attributed to personal failings, and the victim is all too often blamed. (76)

Therefore the paradigm shifts and the unfortunateness of life is viewed as one's own responsibility; thus with this train of thought, the uneducated deserve the menial and low-paying jobs simply because they did not invest in themselves to better their lives or situations.

Further, with the neoliberal belief in privatization, public monies that would have gone toward public social programs, are siphoned into private hands and businesses whose only aim and purpose is to turn that capital into more private wealth. Thus, the neoliberal process "rather than the theory, has been a huge success from the standpoint of the upper classes. It has either restored class power to the ruling elites (as in the US and to some extent in Britain [...]) or created conditions for capitalist class formation" (Harvey 156). Neoliberals look to the deterioration of the lower classes as a failure of those individuals who make up those classes; specifically, their personal failures to "enhance their own human capital (through dedication to

education, the acquisition of a Protestant work ethic, submission to work discipline and flexibility)” (157).

The differential distribution of precarity around the globe can also be connected to the neoliberal turn in global policies, making developing nations poorer and some argue even making first-world or more economically developed countries poorer and less developed as well. Harvey contends that “[t]he volatility of uneven geographical development has accelerated, permitting certain territories to advance spectacularly (at least for a time) at the expense of others” (156). One relevant example includes the United States’ neoliberal involvement in Iraq following the 2003 military engagement spearheaded by the G. W. Bush administration. Paul Bremer, head of the Bush administration’s Coalition Provisional Authority released mandates that detailed privatization of all public enterprises, the rights of foreign firms to buy full ownership of Iraqi businesses, “full repatriation of foreign profits,” zero tolerance for trade barriers, and the transfer of control of all Iraqi banks to foreign (invading) powers (6). Whereas Bremer’s pronouncements were in direct violation of the Geneva and Hague Conventions because an occupying power is required to guard the national assets of its host country, not sell them off to the highest bidder, the Bush administration declared its machinations as necessary cogs in the wheel that spreads freedom and democracy.

Bremer’s mandates highlight the neoliberal mindset of free market fundamentalism. To neoliberals, these harsh measures “were both necessary and sufficient for the creation of wealth and therefore the improved well-being of the population at large” (7). Although Bremer’s mandates focused on an occupying force in a sovereign nation, the same methods are also applied ruthlessly by sovereign governments within their own nations. This is why free markets are so important to neoliberals; borders and national identity and solidarity mean very little to the

wealthy elite. An example from recent American memory is the Clinton administration's push for and emphasis on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The NAFTA agreement was "rammed" through Congress against a large vocal outcry from the majority of Americans (Chomsky 102). Whereas the American public was promised "joyous" benefits by a gushing corporate-owned neoliberal media, the Office of Technology Assessment, a research bureau of Congress, concluded "that the planned version of NAFTA would harm most of the population of North America" and proposed "modifications that could render the agreement beneficial beyond small circles of investment and finance" (103). These modifications were never approved.

So, it is through neoliberal policies that the lives of the majority are made worse by the minority. And it is also through the frames of neoliberal policies and its aftermath that the author Mohsin Hamid comes into play. Hamid's manipulations of text frame the neoliberal economic paradigm and governmentality as prime culprits in the differential distribution of precarity throughout the developing worlds about which he writes so poignantly. The precariousness that touches the lives of his characters and tinges his personal life can be traced to the neoliberal turn that dominates the globe today. Further aspects of precarity also dominate Hamid's post-9/11 literature, such as the precarious notions of interconnectivity and obligation.

As much as neoliberals want to believe in the separation of individuals, the theory of precarity contends that there exists an interconnectivity between all lives. Hamid writes that the changes in Changez, in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, occur because he is able to connect himself to the indigenous peoples he encounters in the countries that suffer under the strong neoliberal policies of the interfering and dominating Western corporate hegemony. Once the connection between being a Pakistani and a Filipino or a Chilean is made, Changez sees

himself as a janissary, a warrior who betrays his own peoples in favor of the invading forces. In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, the neoliberal obsession with the self is seen in contrast to the precarious-connectivity to the other. It is only when the protagonist, and the pretty girl, cease their attempts for upward class and economic mobility that they connect with each other through love and peace in their final days. Hamid describes the connectivity that we share, sometimes unknowingly, in the final lines of the novel:

You have been beyond yourself, and so you have courage, and you have dignity, and you have calmness in the face of terror, and awe, and the pretty girl holds your hand, and you contain her, and this book, and me writing it, and I too contain you, who may not yet even be born, you inside me inside you, though not in a creepy way, and so may you, may I, may we, so may all of us confront the end.

(222)

We belong to each other, and when we stop fighting our connectedness and accept our responsibilities and obligations for each other peace ensues. Hamid reiterates this in his third book, *Discontent and Its Civilizations* when he discusses the differences in belonging to a nation and belonging to humanity. Thus, throughout Hamid's post-9/11 work, connectivity is used as a tool to narrate or demonstrate the shared precarity and precariousness across the globe.



## CHAPTER 2: THE NEOLIBERAL TEMPER TANTRUM: BUSINESS AND FUNDAMENTALISM

“You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority.  
And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked  
By the repercussions of your tantrums...”—The Reluctant Fundamentalist (168)

This thesis maintains that Hamid has similar views on the differential distribution of precariousness and economic disparity as other contemporary humanist authors, such as Judith Butler, Noam Chomsky, and Joseph Darda. I would argue in fact that it is the awakening to and acknowledgement of precarity that is the driving factor of Changez’s transformation from pro-American, elite Princeton businessman to Pakistani radical and vehement anti-American rabble-rouser in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Because the theory of precarity supposes that *all* life is precarious, “We must understand the human as ‘precarious,’ as faced with life’s end from the start, and differentially so” (Darda 110). This is to say that Western lives are precarious, too; but certain populations are framed with more precariousness because of the uneven or differential distribution of neoliberal policies enforced by corporate and political free market ideologies. This framing, though, proves to be temporary and tenuous when offered the chance to see through the other’s point of view, as Hamid showcases the precarity caused by neoliberal economic free markets and trickle-up economics.

It is my contention that Hamid writes back against the machinations of war: the legality of killing and the paradigmatic frame in which the death of an enemy or collateral damage is “either omitted or celebrated as a victory, it is cast as ungrievable and hence not a life to begin with; it is situated outside our frame of life” (Darda 110). For the West and Western authors, the lives being lived in extreme poverty, diseased and malnourished, or the innocents obliterated by casual drone strikes do not count as lives, hence they are not seen or acknowledged or even considered as *human*. Because they are not recognized as *human*, they are not mourned; they are called collateral damage, but not lives lost. The theory of precarity, as used as a literary

criticism, translates Hamid's writings into a commentary that recognizes that more precarity exists in the developing world because of Western policies, specifically Western Neoliberalism. Unfortunately, as Hamid posits throughout his novel, the West is both blind to the precariousness of others and its complicity.

The precariousness of life, Darda claims, is something with which the Western world is less familiar, but something of which Hamid exposes in his attempts to explain "the ways in which some lives are made more precarious than others" (110). Hamid does this poignantly in his book, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, when the protagonist is riding luxuriously in a limousine, set apart by more than just metal in a Manila traffic jam, Changez encounters a native Manila peasant at the exact moment of feeling intense capitalistic pride. Changez locks eyes, randomly and serendipitously, with a common Filipino jeepney driver after successfully meeting with a Filipino company ripe for American corporate take-over. Hamid describes Changez being left apprehensive after the encounter, shocked to discover that "he and I shared a sort of Third World solidarity" (Reluctant 67). It is at this exact moment when the jeepney driver's "dislike was so obvious, so *intimate*" that Changez was immediately angered at the man's contempt for his association with the pale-skinned and Caucasian Western colleagues, to whom Changez's gaze then turned to examine the fair hair and blue eyes of one sitting near to him. (67). Changez explores the dichotomy between being West Asian, and in all practicable purposes *brown*, and being an elite banker within New York's top evaluation firm, Underwood Samson. Hamid writes, "I felt in that moment much closer to the Filipino driver than to him; I felt I was play-acting when in reality I ought to be making my way home, like the people on the street outside" (67). This dual-consciousness that Changez first experiences is significant. This is the turning point, from businessman to radicalist. Suddenly, Changez "apprehends this man's life as a

precarious life—according to the social conditions that do or do not sustain him as a citizen of the Third World—and thereby forms the basis of recognition that breaks the frames of recognizability set for him by Underwood Samson” (Darda 112).

It is also important to note, again, that Changez begins to put into context the effects of Western capitalism on the developing nations that are exploited. Much of this exploitation comes from the contemporary Neoliberal economic and political paradigm, a philosophy designed, theoretically, for the restructuring of international capitalism or “as a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” (Harvey 19). In the US, the presidency of Ronald Reagan saw the final turn and push toward a complete neoliberal state. By the time Changez is working for the evaluation firm, the US is a frontrunner in neoliberal policy and politico-economic dominance. Whereas technically the age of imperialism faded from radar toward the end of the nineteenth century, a “more open system of imperialism without colonies” evolved during the twentieth century (Harvey 27). The paradigmatic policy was for the US to support local insurgencies or guerillas in foreign, unstable countries, and then to support the local “strongman” with “economic and military assistance to him and his family and immediate allies so that they could repress or buy off opposition and accumulate considerable wealth and power for themselves” (27). In payment for their rise to power, these strongmen “would always keep their country open to the operations of the US capital and support, and if necessary promote US interests,” sometimes at the expense of their own country and countrymen (Harvey 27).

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the US has looked upon Pakistan with strategic and military interest, but without economic favor. Military analysts in 1947 began to recognize the importance of Pakistan’s physical location, “its leading role [...] in the Middle Eastern region

and viewed it as a potential balancer in the South Asian power paradigm but looked at India as a Japan's successor in Asiatic imperialism" (Khan 64). Geopolitical tensions between the US, Russia, and China directed the US to look more toward India, mostly because its economic partnership looked more fruitful. However, the tables soon turned after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December, 1979. Suddenly, Pakistan's geopolitical relevance came back into the spotlight and the US "rushed to revive her strategic and military relationship with the latter and transformed her 'sanctioned ally' into the 'frontline state role'" (Khan 68-69). Pakistan took advantage of the resumed US affections and was willing to play a colonist role "for her own domestic and security reasons" (Khan 71). As noted, "for the US, the underlying considerations were global but for Pakistan, only regional considerations were important" (71). The Reagan administration, along with William Casey, the director of the CIA, wanted to fuel the Afghan insurgency against the Soviets through subversive manipulations through Pakistan. During this time, the US turned a blind-eye toward Pakistan's budding nuclear program. However, once the Soviets withdrew, Pakistan's importance to the US diminished. Nuclear sanctions were soon imposed upon Pakistan, funding and financial and military aid ceased, and Pakistan suddenly was forced to stand again on her own two feet after leaning, heavily, on the US for over two decades.

Hamid makes this connection symbolically. The man who stares at Changez with "undisguised hostility" is driving a jeepney, a portmanteau vehicle that combines the left over parts from American Jeeps abandoned after World War II with spare Filipino parts (Darda 112). Hamid evokes the long history of imperialism in developing countries and imperialistic "atrocities committed" when he describes the Filipino man driving the jeepney (112). Hamid uses the juxtaposition between Changez's situation and the jeepney driver to emphasize that

precariousness is a “politically induced condition” (113). Changez begins to realize that as a Pakistani, he could have been the man driving the jeepney. Like the Philippines, Pakistan has suffered debilitating interferences as a western pawn. Changez recognizes that he shares more in common with the jeepney driver than his associates with whom he shares the limousine. After this realization, Changez begins to see his co-workers in a different light; a light in which their capitalistic and imperial interests are blind to the suffering and precariousness their callous business practices incur on local populations.

He begins to question himself; he questions responsibility and to whom and for what is he responsible, is he inexplicably bound to others, such as the jeepney driver, in necessary or exponential ways, and where does he belong? Changez begins to feel solidarity with the world that is exploited and raped by western capitalism. This solidarity against the West is not founded on religious extremism but on the precariousness of life and nationalistic bonds that are “grounded in the struggle against nationalistic forms of brutality. The men do not know each other and ‘would probably never see one another again’ and yet they are bound by a ‘sort of’ global imaginary that Changez is only beginning to perceive” (Darda113). In this pivotal moment Changez realizes the connectivity of the shared precarity of all life, and not only recognizes the jeepney driver as another human life, but a life that shares a common background and ancestry. Changez is suddenly aware of his contribution in exacerbating the jeepney driver’s precariousness.

Peter Morey emphasizes that Hamid’s character changes from pro-American to anti-American *before* 9/11 and its aftermath. This is quite significant, and can help explain why 9/11 happened. Changez’s changes begin to happen not because of any encounter with religious extremism but with the encounters with those who are afflicted with the consequences of

Western imperial-like capitalism. Instead of religious zealotry, Changez radicalizes because of business fundamentalism based upon neoliberal economic theory. Changez was trained to consider all the variables that will both contribute to and help sustain a business or hinder and endanger a business, according to western normative business practices. However, the theory of precarity recognizes all variables that either sustain or endanger a life. Darda asserts that “[i]n his awakening to the precarity of others, Changez begins to realize that the former’s aims do not align with and even directly contradict those of the latter” (113), which means that his business fundamentalism conflicts sharply with his sense of connectivity to those who are exploited by neoliberal practices. Morey states that the goal of Hamid’s novel is to play upon the “curiosity stimulated by political rhetoric that sees the Muslim as irredeemably different but, nonetheless, needing to be decoded if the ‘battle for hearts and minds’ is to be won” (Morey 139). Hamid “‘writes back’ to both imperial and neo-imperial centres [sic]”; Morey claims that by describing the journey through which Changez radicalizes, Hamid offers an “interesting snapshot of the bifurcation of the world after 9/11 and an awareness that old colonial instincts are still alive and well in the nations of the West—even if they sometimes cloak themselves nowadays in the rhetoric of globalization or liberal interventionism (145). This bifurcation of the West is conveniently absent in predominant post-9/11 rhetoric stemming from the mainstream Western telecommunications outlet.

This opinion is complemented by Harleen Singh, who takes it one step further and relates Hamid’s writing back to the re-education of Western audience about post 9/11 rising Asia.

Singh writes that Hamid’s:

litany of events defies the expectations of fundamentalism as it aligns radicalism with the modern secular, educated, and privileged Pakistani elite, rather than with

the prescriptive pre-modern regressive, illiterate, and intolerant jihadi. The novel is significant not only for its characterization of the fundamentalist but also for its form, which creates a voice for the Pakistani in congruence with his listener and thus insists upon a measure of complicity. (26).

For Singh, Hamid not only shows another side of Pakistani fundamentalism, but also informs world that it is the educated and the elite *in Pakistan* who are responsible for its precarious state and not the religious and uneducated masses, on whom the blame is often dealt.

Fundamentalism, for Hamid, who also went to Princeton and worked in New York like his semi-biographical character, Changez, also carries with it a professionally corporate meaning. David Gay argues that Hamid uses the term fundamentalism to juxtapose the Western perception of “religious intensity” to that of a reluctant financier (Gay 59). Thus, Gay contends that one cannot look at the title through the Western paradigmatic frame of fundamentalism belonging to that of religious zealotry and jihadism. Instead, one should view the title in context to an immigrant Pakistani who cannot ignore the precarity of life that he sees surrounding him, or the part that he is playing in his role as an evaluator of finance officer for Underwood Samson, a fictitious company whose initials (U.S.) conveniently represent the dominating financial empire, the United States. Throughout his employment with Underwood Samson, Changez is constantly reminded to *focus on the fundamentals*. This was “Underwood Samson’s guiding principle [...] It mandated a single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset’s value” (Hamid 98).

Not ironically, these business fundamentals are juxtaposed with the Western paradigmatic concern over another sort of fundamentalism. Smitten with a blonde clichéd wealthy American, Changez sets his mind to wooing her before his turn from financier to

*fundamentalist*. Upon first meeting her parents, Changez is told by her father (another businessman), “I like Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism” (55). About which fundamentalism is Erica’s father referring: business or religious? If business fundamentalism is focused strictly on the material assets and not emotional sensibilities, Erica’s father’s description of Pakistani fundamentalism, from a business point of view, seems to be without a problem. In fact, Erica father’s synopsis of Pakistani *fundamentalism* coincides nicely with David Harvey’s description of neoliberalism, especially the control found in elitism and the ruling class’ non-allegiance to state or countrymen.

Hamid notes this ironic agreement between business fundamentalism and the American assumption that Pakistani fundamentalism refers only to religious jihadism. Hamid notes the irony when he writes:

I felt myself bridle. There was nothing overtly objectionable in what he had said; indeed, his was a summary with some knowledge, much like the short news items on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, which I had recently begun to read. But his tone—with, if you will forgive me, its typically *American* undercurrent of condescension—struck a negative chord with me. (55)

There is no refutation of fact. From one business man to another, Erica’s father and Changez both agree that Pakistan suffers from a strong case of fundamentalism, and Hamid plays the Western perception of Pakistani fundamentalism against the true fundamentalism, the fundamentalism that created the precariousness in Pakistan and the rest of the developing world.

However, it is not just the witnessing of the bifurcation of precarity or his experience of complicity that changes Changez; rather, the radicalization was a process that got its start in



Manila, but continued though the rejection of him by both his blonde obsession with Erica and New York as well. After Manila, Changez tried to forget the startling realizations that broke his attentions to business and continued his courtship of Erica, the blonde, Manhattan social elite with whom his attentions had been fixed. Changez recalls, “my way of carrying myself—I flattered myself to believe—suggested the impeccability of my breeding [...] my Princeton degree and Underwood Samson business card were invariably sufficient to earn me respectful nod of approval” (*Reluctant* 85).

Yet, during this time when Changez is trying to successfully woo Erica and remain successfully focused on the fundamentals, Changez believed himself to be unworried, but after hearing the rumors of anti-West Asian sentiment gipping the United States, coupled with the severe prejudices he suffered from evaluating a company in New Jersey, his denial began to wane. News of war in Afghanistan frequently perturbed him, and he faced discrimination and hostility at work. A significant conversation with his superior further spurred Changez into radicalized contempt. Interestingly, Hamid references the 1970s neoliberal turn when he has Jim mention, “When I was in college [...] the economy was in bad shape. It was the seventies. Stagflation. But you could just smell the opportunity. America was shifting from manufacturing services” (*Reluctant* 96). This reference to a most decidedly neoliberal turn is not coincidence. This relationship between the neoliberal turn and precarity is furthered when Jim confides to Changez, “You’re blood brought from some part of the body that the species doesn’t need anymore. The tailbone. Like me. We came from places that were wasting away” (97).

However, instead of comforting Changez these words simmered in a sort of precarious stew; he resented the fact that he came from a place condemned to atrophy. He tells the American, to whom he is addressing throughout the entire novel, that

For we were not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aid and handouts; in the stories we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and—yes—conquering kings. We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city [...]. (102)

The bright history of Pakistan shines before the interventionist neoliberal policies of the West. Changez involves the reader to question how Pakistan could be had it not suffered from centuries of imperial and imperial-like intervention.

Another facet of Changez's transformation from businessman to radical, I argue, is Hamid's use of symbols. Whereas Underwood Samson and the United States is an easy analogy to recognize, I would like to entertain the thought that Erica is also analogous to America, as well. Changez is both enthralled and determined to be part of both New York society and Erica's life; however, he is rejected by both for essentially the same reasons. For New York, his Pakistani heritage is enough to distance him from the anti-fundamentalist campaign that swept over the United States shortly after 9/11. Hamid writes about the U.S stepping back into a nostalgia of a time gone by.

There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look *back*. (115)

America, whom Changez ardently admired admired for its progressive lead throughout the later 20<sup>th</sup> century as the bastion of innovation and immigration suddenly closes itself off and shuts

down. It mourns for itself, its illusions of glory and pride ruined, and for the first time Changez sees himself as an alien, an unaccepted outsider, and no longer welcome.

Erica, too, retreated back into a nostalgia that Changez could not follow and soon thereafter committed suicide. Both New York and Erica lost their innocence; one in a terrorist attack and the other to childhood cancer. This makes both New York and Erica confront their own precarity, as well as the precariousness of others in a way in which they were not prepared. Toward the end, Erica is described as retreating into isolationism, devout, out of touch with the rest of the world, and most importantly unaware of the affects her actions had on others. In both instances New York and Erica retreat back into themselves, and Changez is left feeling like an outsider, like one who does not belong, unsure of his identity as he straddles two hemispheres, never feeling equally a part of either. However, Underwood Samson escaped all nostalgia and remained a placid, cold, bulwark in Changez's life, unaffected by the precarity that surrounds it. This conflicts sharply with Changez's Pakistani side, as reference by Jim when he says, "I'd say it's your Pakistani side. You're worried about what's going on in the world," as if this conflicts with an American or neoliberal side that does not (120).

The apprehensions of solidarity are almost complete once Changez is confronted with his ties and history to a people and nation whose precariousness is designated from politically induced conditions "in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Darda 110). True to the theory of precarity, "when one apprehends the precarious life of the other—and thus unconsciously one's own" a paradigm shift occurs (114). And this paradigmatic shift solidifies once Changez re-visits his childhood home in Pakistan, after spending years away in America, living as a wealthy western financier and coming to terms with his own complicity to

the effects of neoliberal market policies. After living in affluent New York and pretending to be of the upper class, Changez is first appalled by the shabby and damaged state of his ancestral home. However, soon after Changez begins to see the human or emotional value where he was trained that none (material) existed. Hamid describes Changez encounter:

I recall the Americanness of my own gaze [...] I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of pain flaking off [...] I was saddened to find it in such a state—no, more than saddened, ashamed. This was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness. (*Reluctant* 124)

This is one of the most pivotal scenes in the book. Changez soon becomes cognizant of the frames with which he is viewing his childhood home when he reconciles how he views his home with the Underwood Sampson frames with how he remembered his home, long before the U.S. frames.

Darda declares that this scene “embodies the basic mechanism of critical global fiction” because “Changez becomes conscious of the frames restricting recognizability and thereby denaturalizes and counteracts them” (Darda 114-115). Changez recognizes that he has become what he hates, “entitled and unsympathetic” (*Reluctant* 124). This is significant because once Changez sees his Pakistani side of life, it becomes extremely difficult for him to go back to the fake, “lacking in substance,” American life (125). Hamid describes Pakistan as “reality” and Changez’s life as an American financier as “play-acting” and the contract of these two lives soon become unbearable for Changez (Darda 116). As symbolism against this dichotomy, Changez grows a beard and returns to New York. He admits that he is “deeply angry,” but at this point, he is not entirely sure about what he is so angry (*Reluctant* 130).

It is this experience in Lahore that ultimately ruins Changez by changing the frames through which he once viewed and valued the world. On what will eventually become his last assignment, Changez is unable to concentrate; he cannot focus on the fundamentals. He oscillated, untethered by his rejections by Erica and New York and his concern over the rising tensions between Pakistan and India and the war in Afghanistan and increasingly besotted with town in which his firm had sent him, Valparaíso, Chile. At one point he is compared to a modern day janissary, and it is asked of him, “Does it trouble you [...] to make your living by disrupting the lives of others” (151).

By this time, the transformation is complete. Changez now sees himself as the servant to the invading empire; except the campaign was mostly financial. Of a co-worker Changez thinks, “I could not respect how he functioned so completely immersed in the structures of his professional micro-universe” when “no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one’s emotional present” (145). He recalls the recent history of the world and America’s incessant “interference in the affairs of others” (156). He leaves for New York, no longer employed at Underwood Samson; no longer in a relationship with Erica- of whom he lost all contact. He explains, “I knew from my experiences as a Pakistani—of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions—that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination” (156). Changez recognizes his complicity in the imperial-like neoliberal corporate takeovers of which Underwood Sampson was a pivotal global player. He compares himself to a modern day janissary, which means that he felt like an indigenous person who has betrayed his own people in favor of the stronger, dominating hegemony of ravaging borders and imperial sovereignty.

Thus, once the frames through which Changez views the world are interrupted, a paradigm shift occurs. Coming from Pakistan, witnessing the precarity in Manila and Chile, followed by the looming threat of war close to home, Changez is made acutely aware of the differential distribution of precarity caused by economic and political inequality, mostly due to contemporary neoliberal policy implementations by western hegemony. Once Changez eyes were opened to his complicity, a sense of solidarity obligation soon took over. He refers to the September as his “spring”, which is interesting to note that his first awakenings to precarity in Manila began in September and set him on his fundamental path. About solidarity, Changez is speaking of Erica (symbolic America) when he says “we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within” (174). This statement by Changez *is* the theory of precarity; our lives have a fundamental dependency on each other—we are connected whether we are conscious of this or not—and because of this, we cannot keep living as if we were not.

### CHAPTER THREE: GETTING RICH AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS: NEOLIBERAL FREE MARKETS

And where moneymaking is concerned, nothing compresses the time frame  
needed to leap from my-shit-just-sits-there-until-it-rains poverty to  
which-of-my-toilets-shall-I-use affluence like an apprenticeship  
with someone who already has the angles all figured out. (*How to Get Filthy Rich* 78)

Whereas *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focuses on the metamorphosis of an individual after being exposed to the awareness to and existence of precarity and the precariousness of others, Hamid's second post-9/11 novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, demonstrates to western audiences precarious lives being lived whilst precarity is unknown. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Asia*, arguably, might well be Hamid's strongest lesson in precarity for Western audiences. What makes this novel particularly stirring are several literary tropes mixed into a poignant narrative. Most notably, Hamid delivers this novel distinctly by using the second person. This is similar to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in which Changez was singularly narrating his soliloquy in his turn from businessman to Pakistani radicalist to an unnamed American. However, whereas both books are considered a narrative, in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, the narrator is the disembodied author of a self-help book speaking directly to the reader. The reader is "you"; "you" becomes *you*—the reader; Hamid's style adds intimacy and invokes an unbidden emotional response and investment. It also adds to the notion of connectedness the theory of precarity proffers because it highlights the ephemeral separations that usually divide the peoples of the first worlds and the developing worlds; suddenly, the reader is transported into another life. Poon describes that

the one-sided narrative employs the second person pronoun "you", interpellating the reader as the reader of a self-help book. Thus "you" refers to both the reader and a character in the text, resulting in a different inflection of the more orthodox triangulated relationship of narrator—reader—character as the reader is denied the safety of distance, becoming as well the conjoined object of satire. (4)

Similar to the postmodern playwright's removal of the fourth wall, which separates the audience from the script, Hamid removes the barrier that separates the reader from the lives being read.

An interaction occurs, a connection is made, and an experience is underway.

Coupled with this unique way of addressing and involving the reader and writing in second person, Poon further describes the novel as a satirical look at the "capitalist, neoliberal notion of the self that is predicated on an overweening sense of control and complete agency" (1). Hamid accomplishes this satirically biting look into the aftermath of neoliberalism through the juxtaposition between the colloquially Western-sounding self-help narrator and the tragic but noble developing-nation characters into whom the reader, or *you*, descends. Addressing the privileged, western reader, Hamid introduces his protagonist, *you*, suffering from a childhood case of Hepatitis E. He compares the suffering and anguish felt with this life-threatening and poverty-derived disease with slight first-world discomforts. Hamid writes that first the reader must find the protagonist suffering, shivering on the ground:

Your anguish is the anguish of a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen. This is all the more remarkable since you've never in your life seen any of these things. The whites of your eyes are yellow, a consequence of spiking bilirubin levels in your blood. The virus afflicting you is called hepatitis E. Its typical mode of transmission is fecal-oral. Yum. It kills only about one in fifty, so you're likely to recover. But right now you feel like you're going to die. (*How to Get 4*)

After this introduction Hamid describes, quite bluntly, the precarious lives of country living in his unnamed developing Asian country. He describes the single mud-walled rooms that families



share within the rotting compounds of their clans. The only water supply is a mere trickle of water most of the year and only fills to capacity during the monsoon season. The fact that the protagonist suffers from hepatitis E is explained when Hamid describes the water supply stemming from an industrial plant and the water that reaches the village is “used as drainage for the fart-smelling gray effluent” (7). Hamid describes the water cycle; “The people of your village relieve themselves downstream of where they wash their clothes, a place in turn downstream of where they drink. Farther upstream, the village before yours does the same” (6).

Water is both important and symbolic. Many times throughout the book the country’s water supply is described as the aquifers run dangerously low and the pipes are dirty, rotting, and contaminated. This is significant because the manner through which the protagonist does find success and becomes filthy rich is through the business of clean water. Water acts as both the divide between the wealthy and the poor, as clean water is a commodity deprived to the poor, and a bridge for the protagonist to transcend poverty as he creates his wealth and ultimately dominates the water supply in his city. It is also significant to note that when the reader is first introduced to the protagonist, sweating, shaking, and miserable, he is suffering from an illness derived from polluted water—the medium over which ultimate control is finally wrested. Water is also seen as “liquid modernity;” that is to say, that like water, the protagonist will only be materially and socially successful if he exhibits the ability to be “flexible, fluid, and changeable as flowing water” (Poon 4). Further, success is only possible because of the neoliberal market-based policies and ideologies; the state who usually has control over the water supply for its people, as a public venture, has privatized the commodity and ceded its control to private, third-party companies who compete against each other for market dominance.

The men of the protagonist's village, many of whom visit home only several times a year, work permanently in the city and send most of their paychecks back to the village to help support their families and clan. The father of the protagonist works as a chef and comes home only a few times a year, yet he makes it back to help his village, his clan, harvest the wheat from the fields in which they toil and in fields which belong to a wealthy landowner. The west Asian peasants are modern serfs, trapped in the cycle of sickness, poverty, and ignorance. Thus, the goal of the narrator, and ultimately the protagonist, is to transcend the cycle of poverty and serfdom, to discover agency, and to rise above class and station.

Another juxtaposition Hamid intertwines within his novel is the subtle relationship he associates between the precariousness of Rising Asia and the former British Empire. Not coincidentally, the self-help book traces its history to Samuel Smiles' 1859 publication, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct*. Smiles work was widely popular with the "rising Victorian class with aspirations to increased status and socio-economic dominance" further, "with its can do attitude emphasis, it signaled a dismissal of those born into privilege and allowed the middle class to see themselves as the new leaders of British imperial nation" (Poon 2-3). The link between Imperial England and the history of colonialism and subsequent precarity as the lingering aftereffects is not lost when viewed through the historical frame. The duality, then, of Hamid's work in light of its historic literary connections, implies a cheeky response, not only to colonialism, but also to the neoliberal notion of self, wealth, and agency. Instead of recognizing the interconnectedness between rural and urban, family and clan, city and state, under neoliberal thought only the isolated individual or self can be seen or taught to rise, meteorically. This is, after all, a self-help book on how to get filthy rich; what is more important

than material success? By following the steps outlined by the narrator, and in order, you will find success.

Yet, the story does not end at the culmination of material wealth, which is the neoliberal endpoint. Throughout the story, the reader is instructed in the steps needed to not only be successful, to escape the poverty-stricken life in the country as a serf, but also to be *filthy* rich. After the steps are followed, and success is found, financial ruin comes in the form of corporate betrayal and theft. The following title of the next chapter that bridges financial ruin with less material regards is Chapter 11, which is a throwback to Hamid's previous work, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in both title and arguably symbolic number for several reasons. It is titled "Focus on the Fundamentals," and yet, the protagonist is no longer in business (*How to Get* 195). In the United States, to file Chapter 11 is to file bankruptcy, and it is in this chapter that the protagonist loses his business. Furthermore, the number 11 invokes images of 9/11, especially when linked to the term *fundamentals*. The protagonist is now in his eighties, and his heart is weak. His wife has long left him, his son is living in America, and he has recently just lost his prodigious business. Hamid admits at the start of the chapter in introducing what is to follow, "I suppose I should consider at this stage confessing to certain false pretenses, to certain subterfuges that may have been perpetrated here" (197).

Living in a two-star hotel, the protagonist finds peace for the first time in his life. He spends his days helping the pilgrim clansmen, first-generation city boys, and other professionals who are seeking to move up the economic ladder. Instead of living isolated, the neoliberal every-man-for-himself, the protagonist connects himself back into the community. Hamid writes, "You accept no financial reward for your contributions, no placement fees or referral tokens, nor do you hunger after the expressions of gratitude bestowed upon you. Your

motivations stem from different sources, from lingering desires to connect and to be of use” (200).

Unplugged from the trials and stresses of making it to the top and staying there, the protagonist suddenly finds himself able to be a spectator in his writhing city. What he sees disturbs him. For the first time, he realizes that the precarity that he thought he had escaped by eventually dominating in business was an illusion. Whereas he has elevated himself from his subaltern beginnings, he has not freed himself of precarity. Hamid explains the powder keg of tensions as the overwhelming precarity of west Asia, under the tenets of neoliberalism, compete for dominance over resources:

But what you do sense, what is unmistakable, is a rising tide of frustration and anger and violence, born partly of the greater familiarity the poor today have with the rich, their faces pressed to that clear window on wealth afforded by ubiquitous television, and partly of the change in mentality that results from an outward shift in the supply curve for firearms. (201)

The tensions to which Hamid refers are also described in his book, *Discontent and Its Civilizations*. Angered by the differential distribution of wealth, opportunity, and access, the precariat may begin to act, violently. Sometimes they are manipulated by religious imams or holy men, but the raw emotions that turn the precariat to violence usually stems from a socio-economic position, not a religious one.

When Hamid refers to Chapter 11 as the chapter in which one must focus on the fundamentals, Hamid is showing his hand. Suddenly, the brutality of life, which seemed to not phase the narrator or the protagonist in the beginning, is shown to have had an impact after all. The somewhat callous way in which the suffering, poverty, and general unfairness of life that

surrounds the protagonist is finally judged. After a lifetime of competing and working toward business dominance, foregoing any true personal attachments, the protagonist lives his last five years simply. He retires permanently from business and moves in with the love of his life, the pretty girl, about whom more will be discussed. The fundamentals in this sense are neither financial nor are they economical. They are the fundamentals of the human condition; they are what truly matter when faced with the end of our lives. In his final years, the protagonist is at peace, or makes peace, with his life, “for despite all else you have loved, you have loved your father and your mother and your brother and your sister and your son and, yes, your ex-wife, and you have loved the pretty girl” (222).

The pretty girl, the protagonist’s childhood love and one constant throughout his ever-changing life, is another example of the precarity traced back to neoliberalism. Whereas the lives of women are affected dramatically in the West, the female gender roles in western Asia suffer from more precarity than males. The oppression of the feminine is due to staunch patriarchy stemming from traditional gender norms, culture, and religion exacerbated by neoliberal economic policies. As the economy dwindles because of neoliberal practices and precarity rises, Pakistanis turn to religion, anti-Western rhetoric, and other forms of rebellion, such as *Changez* and the protagonist’s youth brigade at University. Historically, gender norms in Western Asia involve “unpredictability” (Joy, Belk, and Bhardwaj 1741). Religions and cultures provide a heavily stratified society, as Hamid describes. Masses live in abject poverty, with a small, scrambling middle class, and even smaller upper class. Those at the bottom of society bear the burdens of all society. The poor women, those who live either in the country or the slums of the cities, like the pretty girl and the protagonist’s sister, “are at a far greater risk of being gang raped” and “at the mercy of the powerful” (1741). One of the key identifiers of the precariat, the

class of peoples whose lives are most precarious, is vulnerability. The most vulnerable of Hamid's characters are the women.

As mentioned previously in Chapter One, neoliberal theories dictate that the subaltern and precariat are personally responsible for their own precarity and quality of life. If someone is poor, disenfranchised, or otherwise precarious then it is the fault of that person because of lack of education, lack of self-investment. However, Gayatri Spivak posits that this is nigh impossible, for as soon as one realizes that one is subaltern and strives for agency and upward mobility, one is no longer subaltern, thus "the subaltern cannot speak" (104). Thus, precarious peoples, like the protagonist's sister or mother, are unable to better themselves or to alleviate or lessen their precarity because they are unaware that they have some power to change their station in life; they are unaware of their own agency that neoliberals assume they must have and use. Their precarious lives consume them. The protagonist's mother is a good example. A strong and dutiful woman, she is described as being formidable and perfectly capable in her station in life, yet she still has no control over her fate and possesses no tools to alter or change it. Hamid writes, "In an all-female society your mother would likely rise to be queen, a bloody staff in her hand and crushed skulls beneath her feet. Here the best she has been able to manage is for the most part to be spared severe provocation" (*Filthy Rich* 10).

Although the mother's capability spared a few unpleasanties, she still lacked the tools with which she could recognize or exercise her own agency. After being diagnosed with thyroid cancer in a socio-economical class whose standard of living is far beneath any type of medical insurance or health care access, the family with whom her husband, the protagonist's father, was employed as a chef for decades, accepts the father's petition for help. Relying on her charity, the protagonist's mother's life is in her hands. The woman, described as the matriarch, agrees to pay

for a surgery that may yet still save the mother, although an earlier and less invasive treatment would have saved her life had she received care sooner. The matriarch agrees to pay for the mother's surgery, a sum whose amount surpasses what she pays the protagonist's father annually, but declines to pay for any further services, such as hormonal therapies and radiation treatments. She declares to the doctor in front of the mother and protagonist, "That will be her family's responsibility," although it is clear to all that the family has no means to finish the cure after the surgery (65).

For the first time in her life, the mother is faced with her own mortality and feels "perplexed by her wounded status, like a soldier who has been shot but as yet sees no blood" (66). Never before had she had to rely on external treatments or others, the individualistic emphasis of neoliberalism denies any obligation of society or community to create safety nets in the form of social services or socialized medicine to ensure comprehensive healthcare or treatment to all. The surgery does not save the mother, and it becomes clear that more therapy is needed, but those resources lie far outside of her precarious reach. Her suffering continues and "Her death, in the absence of modern palliative care, is preceded by agony, only partially mitigated in her final fortnight by street heroin procured by your brother and administered by your father through slender, long-filtered women's cigarettes" (71). The protagonist's sister is able to come, and there is a touching moment described by Hamid between the two as they cling to each other in the mother's final moments. Both are echoes of each other. In the sister, "your mother perceives echoes of her own mother, whom she last saw the same age as your sister is now, when your mother was a little girl" and the sister sees in her mother where her own life and its end is headed (72). The contrast between neoliberal thought and the theory of precarity is woven, touchingly, in the scene of the mother's passing. Her suffering, and her death to cancer,

could possibly have been prevented under different circumstances had she not have been so precarious. The astronomical cost of healthcare, the squalor in which she slaved to maintain, and the lack of sanitary food and water contribute to her standard of living and later her agonizing death. These factors can be directly traced to the whims of others who profit from and therefore enforce neoliberal policies.

The protagonist's mother, and his sister, live the lives handed to them. They are born into poverty, they live in poverty, and they die in poverty. The protagonist's mother and sister are not educated. They marry young and are expected to breed strong, healthy boy children. A young girl, whose menses has just started, the protagonist's sister is given to her paternal uncle, more than a decade her senior, to replace his first wife who died in childbirth. Although she was the middle child and displayed the most aptitude and enthusiasm for education, she was denied schooling and worked as a cleaning girl to help support her family so her brothers could attend school. Even when she was still a child living at home, the protagonist's sister's childhood lost its innocence quicker than her brothers. After waiting for her little brother and playmate to come home from school, she could not escape the oppression of her femininity, even in the imaginative play of children.

In the slums of an inner city, two young children, a brother and sister, play a childish game between the dilapidated buildings and crumbling apartment blocks. A trickle of sewer runoff, no wider than a modest hop, divide the two and their peculiar behavior denotes a charade that details fording great waters, invisible crocodiles, and the traversing of unspoilt and adventurous lands. However, the fun ends quickly when the protagonist's sister notices a man, leering down at her from a nearby window:



without warning, the spell breaks. You follow your sister's altered gaze and see that a formerly shuttered window is now open. A tall, bald man stands inside, staring at your sister intently. She takes her shawl from you and throws one end over her head, the other across her still-small breasted chest. She says, "Let's go home." (28)

She is soon sent away from the urban slums, back to rural poverty to a life her mother, her mother's mother, and earlier generations had endured.

The protagonist's sister and mother are just two fictitious lives but they represent countless millions of real lives being lived every day, in the same conditions, with the same limitations. This is the irony or satire of Hamid's self-help approach; Hamid emphasizes in Chapter 11 that even if the protagonist did elevate himself above the rigors of poverty, he was still at the mercy of the whims of precarity. The actions of thousands of untold souls all affected his course of actions and could alter his life's path. The pretty girl, who also grew up poor, also strives to escape the precariousness of being poor and female in Rising Asia, and like the protagonist, she cannot escape the precariousness that nests between herself and others. For even though a few choice individuals were able to find agency and escape poverty, the neoliberal machinations of a harshly individualistic society prevented her from keeping security as well.

The pretty girl is first introduced when she and the protagonist are both teenagers in a thriving, sprawling, and chaotic West Asian city that keeps expanding. From his first exposure to her, the protagonist is infatuated with her regal and exotic looks. Unlike his sister and mother, the pretty girl is filled with a desire to change her station. The pretty girl has a one-track mind, and that is focused on escaping her family and city and finding upward mobility. The fact that the pretty girl succeeds in escaping her bottom rung on the socio-economic ladder by using

nonconventional norms show that Butler is correct in this manner. Unlike the mother and the sister who abide by their prescribed gender norms, the pretty girl learns from an early age to get what she wants by using her body; she uses her body as a tool to extract her own agency from the men whom she manipulates with sex. When she first encounters the protagonist, she is aware of his attraction and asks him to steal a movie for her. She surprises herself when a genuine affection for the protagonist emerges after a few encounters, but she does not let her feelings for him interfere with her desires and schemes to get away from her downtrodden and poverty-stricken life in the slums.

By using her body, the pretty girl encapsulates the neoliberal brand of feminism about which contemporary American feminists are still fighting. Individuated in the extreme, the pretty girl accepts full responsibility for her upwards mobility, and precedes to map out her success in the modeling business by using her natural assets, her body and her looks, and embraces the patriarchal, heterosexual, and commodity-driven neoliberal culture. Unlike the protagonist, the pretty girl did not come from a loving home. Her father was an abusive gambler and alcoholic and forced the pretty girl and her mother to work and support his addictions. The pretty girl used her body and her natural good looks to flee her circumstances, and separate herself from her beginnings, but like the protagonist, she could not flee from her precarity.

Unlike the successful neoliberal businessmen and women in the West, the pretty girl and the Protagonist, although alleviated from their poverty, continue to live precariously, more so than their western counterparts. Once they are wealthy and successful, they are still subject to the whims of countless of strangers. Their precarity continues in part because there is no underlying social infrastructure in place to prevent the after effects of calamities and mishaps from ruining them. This lack of infrastructure is a hallmark of neoliberalism. A radical emphasis

on privatization and personal responsibility, instead of public and social enterprises, takes away the safety nets of social programs and watchdog groups. The protagonist, in fact, created his wealth by bribing public officials with private interests and this has left him little recourse in way of salvation after his financial ruin. The pretty girl, who loses her assistant and her business in an armed robbery, has no insurance on which to fall back. Subject to the uncontrollable actions of other people, the pretty girl and the protagonist both rise and fall in rising Asia.

## Chapter Four: Dismantling the Frames and Exposing the Framer: The Discontent of Neoliberalism

I wrote a piece for a US publication about the fears of my parents  
and sister in Pakistan as the US prepared to attack Afghanistan.  
The paper deleted a paragraph on reasons for the anger  
felt toward America in many Muslim-majority countries.

Hamid's third post-9/11 work is slightly different from the preceding two in that instead of fiction, Hamid offers his readers a glimpse into his personal correspondences, thoughts, and independently published pieces. Hamid presents himself as his third study in precariousness caused by neoliberal economic policies and geopolitical happenstance resulting from 9/11 and the War on Terror. Published in 2015, *Discontent and Its Civilizations: Dispatches from Lahore, New York, and London* discusses Hamid's childhood, first loves, fatherhood, and the troubles with living in and being from Pakistan. *Discontent and Its Civilizations* is the perfect book with which to conclude this thesis because it discusses in Hamid's personal experiences with the precariousness that plagues West Asia and its roots to 9/11 with little allegory or symbolism.

*Discontent and Its Civilizations* is titled in response to Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, published in 1930. However, instead of arguing against Freud's theories that malcontent arises from civilizations, Hamid demonstrates the theories and the discontent by using himself and his experiences as poignant examples. This is why in Hamid's title, discontent comes first—an emphasis as if to say that to be discontented is to be civilized. Discontent is the norm and it comes *before* civilizations; in fact, Hamid argues that discontent is the unifying factor that underlies all civilizations. For Mohsin Hamid,

Civilizations are illusions, but these illusions are pervasive, dangerous, and powerful. They contribute to globalization's brutality. They allow us, for example, to say that we believe in global free markets and, in the same breath, to discount as impossible the global free movement of labor; to claim that we

believe in democracy and human equality, and yet to stymie the creation of global institutions based on one-person-one-vote and equality before the law. (8)

The hypocrisy is real, and that is the struggle against which Hamid writes. The connectivity between lives and the obligations and responsibilities that are inherent in sharing the world are washed over with the illusion that only the neoliberal concept of self is truth. Hamid writes against the mirage that civilizations are created out of segregated individuals. Civilizations are created out of humans, out of people—connected.

For Hamid, the clash between the East and the West is older than the Silk Road, and it is the clashing between civilizations, which he identifies as Freud's discontent, that makes a civilization. "People have always intermingled," Hamid claims, which explains the language similarities across the globe. This intermingling is not the result of 20<sup>th</sup>-century globalization, and the discontent is not the result of the differences in civilizations. Hamid explains that "[i]ndividuals have commonalities that cut across different countries, religions, and languages—and differences that divide those who share a common country, religion, and language. The idea that we fall into civilizations, plural, is merely a politically convenient myth" (154). That is to say that other civilizations are framed, sometimes purposefully and sometimes organically, and it is this framing, not the collective grouping of individuals, that creates civilization.

In the first few pages, Hamid readily admits to his readers that Pakistan is a nation befuddled with problems, and those problems are serious. He confesses that "a lack of agency has been at the heart of Pakistan's failures, an impulse to blame foreign powers who, while very far from guiltless in the Pakistani context, have only secondarily contributed to Pakistan's ongoing crises, which remain primarily of Pakistan's making" (*Discontent* 4). This is a solid acknowledgment of Western neoliberal economic and political interferences, and an allusion to

the aforementioned meddling of the United States during the Russian campaign in Pakistan, as discussed in Chapter 2; yet, it is also a recognition that Pakistan is not blameless for its mess, either. Instead of bemoaning its victim status, Hamid writes that Pakistan is the only entity that can cure itself.

Hamid acknowledges the framing of Pakistan by western media and recalls the political turmoil of the 1980s under the guise of a “mustachioed dictator with dark bags under his eyes and a fondness for dystopian social reengineering” (23). General Zia-al-Haq intended to legislate and enforce an ethically Islamic society within Pakistan. Roving packs of students, such as the group with whom the protagonist in *How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* aligns himself before his mother’s death, are a result of fanatical social cleansing: “Thugs belonging to the student wings of religious parties seized control of many college campuses. Heroin and assault rifles flooded the streets, ‘blowback’ from Pakistan’s alliance with the United States against the Soviets in Afghanistan” (23).

For West Asians, America was an ally against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Because of the saturation of western media, Hamid writes that when he was a child, this association with the United States meant “[w]e were with the good guys and we would win. I had seen enough cartoons and films to have no doubt about it” (125). However, this love affair was only one-sided. By the time Hamid went to Princeton “few Americans [he] met seemed to think of Pakistan as an ally. Fewer still knew where Pakistan was” (126). This highlights the disparity between the effects of neoliberal policy and its differential global distributions. As a Pakistani youth, Hamid was acutely aware of the economic and political ramifications that are associated with being the recipient and *benefactor* of western neoliberal interference, whereas the effects

and even the recognition of this relationship were absent for the youth in America. Hamid continues:

After the war, America turned its back. Aid and military supplies were cut off. My friends at home were shocked by this. I, living in America, was less surprised. In America, the murky, unknown places of the world are blank screens: stories of evil can be projected on them with as little difficulty as stories of good. (126)

The alliances, truces, and pacts that America has made in the heat of the moment stale when the moment fades. Suddenly, it was no longer fruitful to be allied with Pakistan, and once again it was made into an Other.

Hamid is acutely aware, perhaps because he has one foot in the West and one foot in the East, of the active and purposeful framing of Middle Eastern and West Asian countries in the Western media. This framing, which fills in the blank spaces in a news story or on the television, is used as a convenient way to explain the tragic state of the precariousness of certain countries. When the West is conditioned to accept the precariousness of West Asia because of its unstable socio-political and economic status when viewed through manufactured frames, West Asia's "guilty status becomes the viewer's inevitable conclusion" (Butler *Frames* 8). But of what exactly is West Asia guilty? As Judith Butler explains, when one is framed, the frame serves only as an "editorial embellishment of the image, if not a self-commentary on the history of the frame itself" (8). The frame serves to enhance the viewer's perception of an image, not the actual image itself; thus, the framing of Pakistan in Western media serves to enhance the Western perception of an area and not to portray an accurate representation of Pakistan. Hamid

acknowledges this manufactured version when he recalls the projections onto the blank canvases or screens.

As I mentioned in Chapter One when I gave the Paris attacks as an example of the differential distribution of precarity, the divisive factor is nationality and not necessarily race in precarity, and Hamid continues to exemplify this with his own experiences. He describes that part of this is because Pakistan constantly plays the role of the villain in global news and media. “It is, we are constantly told, a place where car bombs go off in crowded markets, beheadings get recorded in grainy video, and nuclear weapons are assembled in frightening proximity to violent extremists” (*Discontent* 58). In this way, Hamid recognizes that Pakistan and Pakistanis are framed both consciously and unconsciously as villains. He writes, “I never believed the role Pakistan plays as a villain on news shows. The Pakistan I knew was the out-of-character Pakistan, Pakistan without its make-up and plastic fangs, a working actor with worn-out shoes, a close family, and a hearty laugh” (60). This is the Pakistan about which he writes in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. This is the country in which love blossoms between the protagonist and the pretty girl on the sidelines of the villainous show. This is also the Pakistan from which Changez emerges as the young and hopeful youth only to be crushed by the country he grew up loving and the rejection of a society he had always thought of himself to be a part. The very western side of Pakistan is a Pakistan that is not readily visible to Western eyes, but exists for millions of West Asians.

Pakistan’s alliance with the United States is also mentioned in one of the more personally emotional entries in the book when Hamid addresses his Pakistani heritage and how it affects him outside of Pakistan. Living in New York after graduating from Princeton, much like his character Changez, Hamid describes the steps and obstacles he had to humbly encounter and



overcome to get an Italian visa—steps that are not required by any native-born westerner.

Hamid writes that he is well dressed: “A navy suit, pinstriped, three-buttoned. White shirt, blue tie, brown face, brown eyes. I shaved this morning but missed a patch beside my chin. The stubble there, though short, is dense. Fundamentalist stubble. Ayatollah, Hezbollah stubble” (35). Hamid is acutely aware of his appearance, of his accent, and ancestry when he is in a western country. With him he brings the necessary documents: a letter from his employer, a bank statement, proof of insurance, a recent pay stub, an airline ticket, and a hotel booking. His smile is dishonest and he knows that it is obvious; he says that it is the “smile of a man who hopes his smile will make it easier for him, insincere as attempts of sincerity tend to be” (36). Hamid invokes his readers to consider how could a person in his shoes smile sincerely, and if that smile were sincere in what ways would it be perceived.

The visa officer whom he addresses is described as human. She is “almost friendly in return. We are both young, after all, healthy members of the same species and of breeding age” (36). Hamid draws attention to the invisible barriers that are constructed between them simply because of the roles that each must play in this shared experience inside the consulate. Because Hamid has succeeded in the past with securing himself a visa, he writes that this flags him as untrustworthy. Another request to travel to Italy has raised suspicion. Why would a Pakistani be so interested in traveling to Italy? “Love, I say. My girlfriend is Italian,” he explains (36). Sadly, this noble sentiment is not enough to qualify him in light of his recent success. Further proof is required for this Pakistani man to be allowed to travel to Italy. The consulate officer responds, “I am afraid we will need proof: a notarized letter and a copy of her passport” (36). A notarized letter from his girlfriend, as well as a photocopy of her passport must be attached to Hamid’s application before his visa can be approved.

For any American, these steps seem superfluous and unnecessary. We have our rights to privacy and our freedoms that we take for granted when we wish to travel abroad. Our personal lives and relationships have little bearing on the legality of our personal travels. However, for Hamid, this is part of being a non-westerner, an Other. He writes that he knows that he is still lucky. At any point in his application the official could have flatly refused his request without reason. He writes, “Other visa officers in other consulates regularly reject my kind for far less” (37). His terminology denotes that he also believes in the illusory separations that divide people from each other when he mentions his kind being separate from the consulate officer’s kind. He believes in the separations because they exist, not because they are real. Hamid talks about race being “too clumsy” of a boundary or divide between peoples or kinds. He declares that “Nationality, unless overcome by wealth, is a far more acceptable proxy. Nations deemed prone to poverty and violence are walled off to consume themselves, to fest. And nationality-based discrimination, denying both our common humanity and our unbelievably varied individuality as it frisks us at the border” (37).

Individuality, Hamid posits, is ignored in favor for a more homogeneous and monolithic collectivity. This is another side-effect of civilization when the Others are classified or lumped into a single identity. This is what Changez fights throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and arguably Hamid’s main point in his re-education of western audiences. Hamid writes of his frustration, as an author, when critics and readers alike continue to describe his 2007 novel as the metamorphosis of a man who becomes a religious extremist, an “Islamic fundamentalist” (222). For the West, this means that Changez has embraced religious zealotry and justifies extreme forms of violence in the name of religion. However, this term is a misnomer as I have explained before. Hamid writes,

I'm not sure what that term means, exactly, but I have a reasonable idea about the sentences and paragraphs that are actually present in the book [...] there's no real evidence that Changez is religious. He doesn't quote from scripture. He never asks himself about heaven, hell, or the divine. He drinks. He has sex outside of marriage. His beliefs could quite plausibly be those of a secular humanist. And yet he calls himself a Muslim, and is angry with US foreign policy, and grows a beard—and that seems to be enough. Changez may well be an agnostic, or even an atheist. Nonetheless he is somehow, and seemingly quite naturally, read by many people as a character who is an Islamic fundamentalist. (224)

Hamid exposes the framing in which Changez is constantly being framed. He is not *religiously* fundamental; he is fundamentally a businessman. Yet, because of his background and because of his appearance, he is still seen as the western creation of a religious zealot.

And this is the basic premise of his *Discontent and Its Civilizations*. The large-scale grouping of the monolithic, homogeneous, and fabricated collectivity of the Other, framed and perpetuated by the West. "Islam is not a monolith," he writes, and the refusal of the West to acknowledge the variations and heterogeneousness of individuals is the leading factor of Islamophobia and helps create or justify the unequal distributions of precarity that plague the globe (220). Instead of seeing the forest for the trees, Hamid requests a paradigm shift. "Each individual human being is, after all, a minority of one," he writes, and we clearly see this in *How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, in Hamid's own study of the individual and individual precariousness in rising Asia.

The protagonist and the pretty girl are two nameless individuals in a nameless sea of others, but what makes them different is the relationship that is formed between the reader and

the character. Two obscure people, living in an overpopulated and underfunded land, are recognized on the Western radar. Suddenly, lives are acknowledged as being lived where they had just existed before. On his use of second-person, Hamid writes about his intended desire for the transcendental experience of involving the reader in a majestic game of make-believe; he writes, “I thought my next novel should try to be explicit about this, about the nature of the reader-writer relationship, the notion that ‘you’ could simultaneously be audience and character and maker” (104). Hamid’s use of the second person is designed to first and foremost share experiences of individuals with individuals. He writes,

My growing sense was that a kind of self-expression (and self-transcendence, and even self-help) is central to what fiction does, both for writers and for readers.

And so *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* was born, a novel that is a self-help book that is a second-person life story that is an invitation to create. Together.  
(104).

By including the reader and effectively drawing you into his narrative, Hamid invites you to create a second life for yourself, a life in which you can live as millions of other—a chance to walk in someone else’s shoes.

So it is with this inclusion in mind, to educate or remind the western reader of the connectivity that invariably exists between all lives, with which Hamid purposefully writes. His post-9/11 works describe a very different story or framing than what the western reader typically is presented through western-framed media. For Hamid, Pakistanis and other West Asians are not necessarily the fundamentally religiously intolerant, backward, and uncivilized peoples who hate the west because of their infidelity. Instead, a reading of Hamid’s world offers a glimpse into the differential distribution of wealth, medicine, science, etc., that remains unjust and unfair

for those living in still-developing nations. Such disparities necessarily make certain people and nations more precarious, more easily used and ignored by the West in our current neoliberal social and economic practices. Hamid re-educates the west by offering another framing, a different point of view of what it is like to suffer from or be inflicted with the tragic fate of being born in or being from a precariously west Asian country.

## Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso, 2004. Print.
- . "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. 26.2 (2012): 134-151. Print.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999. Print.
- Darda, Joseph. "Precarious World: Rethinking Global Fiction in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. 47.3 (2014): 107-122. Print.
- Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003. Print.
- Gay, David. "Confronting Myths of Difference: Fundamentalism, Religion and Globalization in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Religious Studies and Theology*. 30.1 (2011): 57-70. Print.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *Discontent and its Civilizations: Dispatches from Lahore, New York, and London*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2015. Print.
- . *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2013. Print.
- . *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007. Print.
- Hartnell, Anna. "Moving through America: Race, place and resistance in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. 46.3-4 (2010): 336-348. Print.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Joy, Annamma, Russell Belk, and Rishi Bhardwaj. "Judith Butler on performativity and precarity: exploratory thoughts on gender and violence in India." *Journal of Marketing Management*. 31.15-16 (2015): 1739-1745. Print.
- Khan, Jehangir. "US-Pakistan Relations: The Geo-strategic and Geopolitical Factors." *Canadian Social Science*. 6.2 (2010): 61-79. Print.

- Morey, Peter. "The rules of the game have changed": Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and post-9/11 fiction." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. 47.2 (2011): 135-146. Print.
- Poon, Angelia. "Helping the Novel: Neoliberalism, Self-Help, and the Narrating of the Self in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 2015. doi:10.1177/0021989415583923.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978. Print.
- Singh, Harleen. "Deconstructing Terror: Interview with Mohsin Hamid on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007)." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*. 42.2 (2012): 149-156. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press 1988: 271-313. Print.